

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH REHABILITATION SERVICES**



Testimony of
Vincent Schiraldi
Director
Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services
Committee on Human Services
Wednesday, April 25, 2007

Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to be here today to discuss the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services' proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2008.

During last month's oversight hearing, I provided an overview of where our agency stood in implementing our broad reform efforts. In my remarks this morning, I would like to delve a little deeper into these reforms and describe in more detail how we are improving the safety at our secure facilities, building a continuum of care, and improving placement decisions and alternatives for detained and committed youth.

The proposed Fiscal Year 2008 budget for the Department is \$80,291,686. This represents an increase of \$11,707,900 from the Fiscal Year 2007 budget supporting a staffing compliment of 683 FTE's. An apples to apples comparison of DYRS expenditures over Fiscal Years 2006, 2007, and proposed for 2008 show that, when funds by DC Public Schools, the Department of Mental Health, federal grants and TANF transfers are accounted for, expenditures on the constellation of DYRS services have remained status quo at \$80 million, give or take, each year. Our expenditures have remained consistent, despite the fact that we've substantially improved our staff/youth ration and have experienced a 56% increase in commitments to our custody.

The Fiscal Year 2008 budget heralds exciting reform efforts, including a new, innovative educational program for youth at the Oak Hill Youth Center ("Oak Hill") and a number of nationally recognized best practices and supports such as Youth Family Team Meetings and Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care.

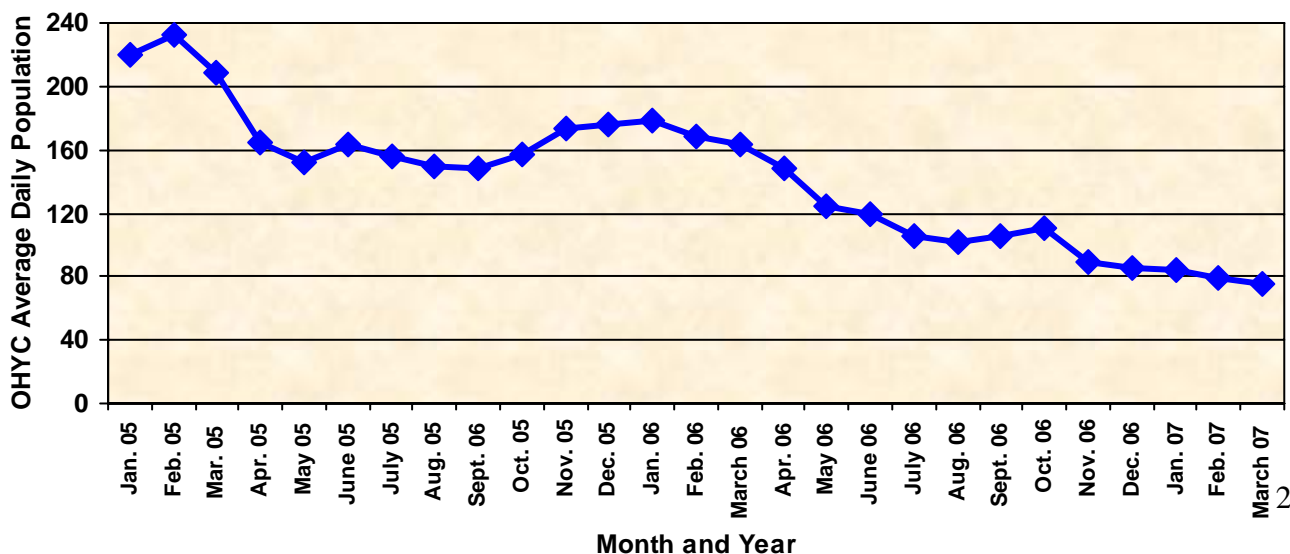
As you know, the District of Columbia's juvenile justice system is bifurcated, with D.C. Superior Court's Social Services Division at the front end of the system and the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services at the back end of the system. However, while Court Social Services has case-carrying responsibilities for youth on detained status, DYRS is still responsible for operating the secure facility where detained youth are housed, as well as licensing and contracting for shelter beds and some detention alternatives for this population. DYRS has complete case-carrying responsibility for youth who are found involved and committed to our care. It is important to understand how youth are processed through this bi-

furcated system and it will shed some light on some of the budget decisions our agency made by our agency.

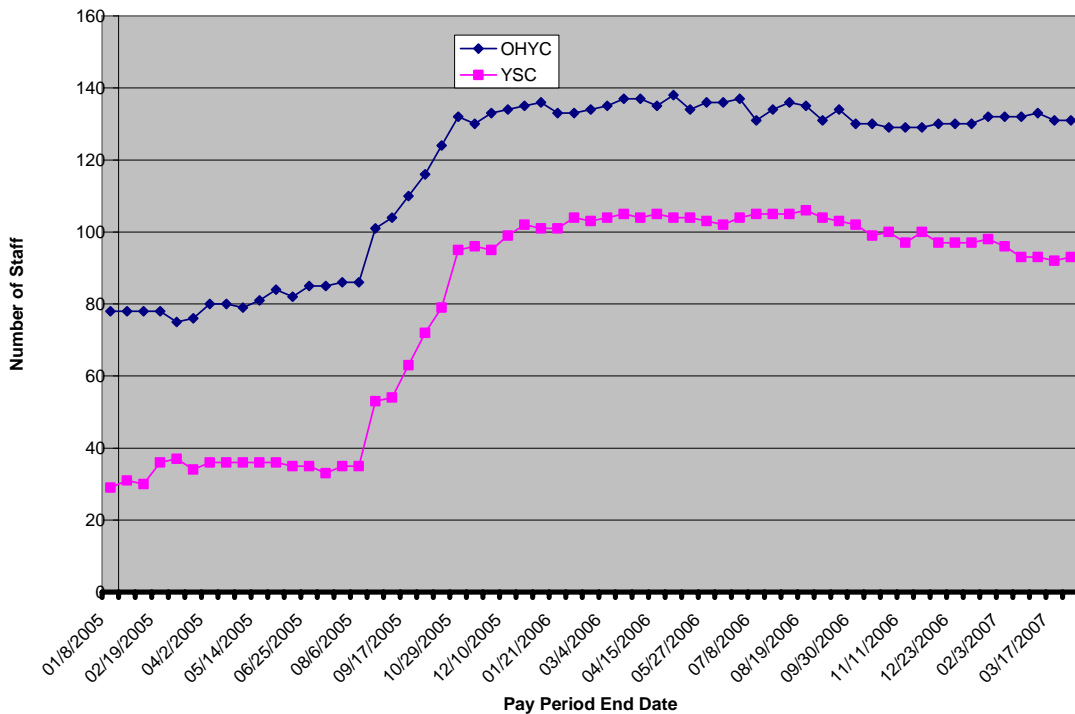
DYRS is steadily improving the safety and conditions of our two secure facilities, the Youth Services Center in Northeast D.C. and the Oak Hill Youth Center in Laurel, Maryland. Last year, data from our Performance Based Standards system, designed by the Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators, reported that our employees believed that additional staff, less overcrowding, and more training would make the facilities safer. These factors were similarly important in the *Jerry M Case*. Our agency has made great strides in each of those areas and, although we still have a way to go, has begun to show positive outcomes for those working and residing in our facilities.

When I first came on board in 2005, it was abundantly clear that Oak Hill was overcrowded and understaffed, two issues that greatly compromise the safety of juvenile corrections facilities across the nation. To make a bad situation worse, about half of the population were on detained status, awaiting their adjudication or disposition. Common sense, concerned professionals, and consent decrees all concur – comingling youth who have not been found involved in offenses with young people who have produced detrimental consequences for our youth and staff.

To reduce the overcrowding at Oak Hill, we began to build a community-based continuum of care to reduce the over-reliance on secure facilities and participate in multiple interagency collaborations such as the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI), to improve case processing and placement decisions. Below you will see that in the winter of 2005, our youth population at Oak Hill skyrocketed to 240 youth, which included a combination of detained and committed youth. Through the JDAI collaborative, which is chaired by Judge Josey Herring and includes active participation by your office, Court Social Services, OAG, PDS, MPD, DMH and CJCC, the District has been able to significantly reduce our confined population by 2/3 without jeopardizing public safety. We currently house fewer than 80 youth at Oak Hill – none of whom are “detained”. I’d like to emphasize that point, since December, we have stopped comingling detained and committed youth at Oak Hill, a major success of the JDAI initiative. We continue to be vigilant on preventing detained youth from entering the doors of Oak Hill and continue to seek out other options to place these youth in the most appropriate setting consistent with public safety.



Concurrent with our efforts to reduce the population at Oak Hill, we aggressively recruited direct care staff through a media campaign and job fair. In January of 2005 we only had 78 direct care staff at Oak Hill and 29 at the newly opened Youth Services Center. We now have 131 Youth Development Specialists (nearly double the 2005 figure) at Oak Hill and 93 at Youth Services Center (more than three times the 2005 figure). Chairman Wells – both you and I started off our careers as youth workers and I know you will agree with the fact that improving youth to staff ratios results in better programming for kids, and in congregate care settings, safer environments where youth can form positive relationships with adults. Below, you will see a chart demonstrating the increase of Youth Development Specialists (formerly known as Youth Corrections Officers) at both Oak Hill Youth Center and the Youth Services Center.

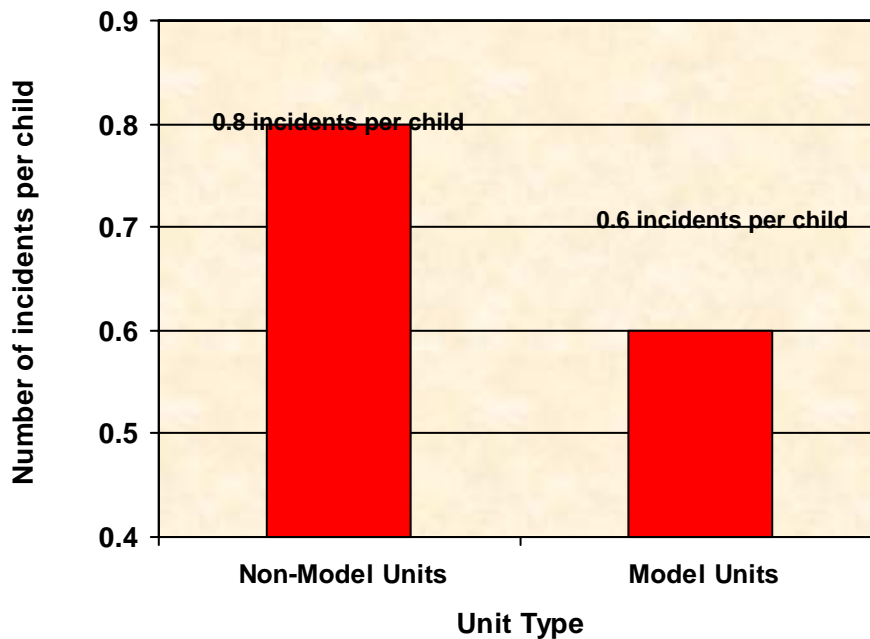


Transforming facilities from a punitive and often harmful correctional model to a decent and humane rehabilitative model not only required more staff, but training and tools for well-equipped youth workers. The quality and quantity of our training for staff has improved dramatically. DYRS has formed partnerships with two leading organizations, the Missouri Youth Services Institute (MYSI) and the National Juvenile Detention Association (NJDA) to assist us in providing training and building our capacity to deliver enhanced “in house” training in the future. To date, we have trained 90 staff at Oak Hill Youth Center on what we call the “DC Model”, our version of Missouri’s nationally renowned therapeutic programming. Each participant receives 10.5 days of intensive training on facilitating treatment groups, reshaping behaviors, crisis management, and other issues focused on

improving the safety and well-being of our youth. We will be implementing two more sessions, training an additional 50 staff members on the DC Model, as well as shorter versions of this training for all culinary, maintenance, and other ancillary staff. In addition, we have designed a training for staff at the YSC in conjunction with the National Juvenile Detention Association and on which we have begun training our management staff. Over the next twelve months, all staff at YSC and Oak Hill will have been trained in their respective models with we believe will greatly improve both safety and the quality of care young people in our custody receive.

In addition to training, MYSI and NJDA senior level consultants provide on-site coaching for our Superintendents and other management and line staff at both facilities. This type of support and training for our staff has been a critical component to our reform efforts. As you can see below, the “DC Model” units at Oak Hill have experienced less major and minor violations than the regular units. We expect that the DC Model units will continue to demonstrate even greater improvements with the addition of four new unit managers, who will be trained on the DC Model by mid-May.

**Number of Major/Minor Violations for Model versus Non-Model Units
Per Child Per Month in Oak Hill Youth Center
December 2006 through March 2007**



While we have improved the safety of our secure facilities, we have also begun to develop high quality workforce development programs to reconnect youth to meaningful employment opportunities. In partnership with the National Association of Service and Conservation Corps and the Earth Conservation Corps, DYRS initiated the Gulf Coast Recovery Corps, which provided a two-month service learning and job-training program for seven youth. The program included life skills training, emergency preparedness training, team building, and

public service opportunities. During the month of December 2006, the youth participated in community service projects throughout the District: feeding the homeless, planting trees, encouraging elementary school children to make positive decisions, and making Christmas cards for Children's Hospital. Then, in January, seven youth Corps members and eight staff flew to Hancock County, Mississippi, where they spent a month helping with the Hurricane Katrina relief efforts. The team built six homes, two community playgrounds, and cleaned up several neighborhoods.

Shortly after the youth returned from Mississippi, DYRS launched the D.C. Civic Justice Corps (CJC). This initiative, the first of its kind in the nation, provides an opportunity for 24 youth to be engaged in public service, life skills training, and workforce development, while earning a salary. The Corps is an innovative program strategy designed to serve youth in community-based settings or youth transitioning out of Oak Hill. Typically, youth in juvenile justice systems see community service as a punishment – often it is a part of a court order. The CJC is voluntary and built on the philosophy that youth are resources and can contribute positive things to the community. The program allows youth to develop their leadership and become environmental stewards. DC CJC youth meet critical needs in the Anacostia community, with projects ranging from cleaning the River to organizing community-wide environmental clean-up days. Case management, after-care support, and peer-to-peer mentoring – both formally and informally – in addition to staff mentoring, round out the work and learning experience. Each youth who completes 900 hours of environmental service becomes eligible for a \$5000 educational scholarship and an open door for long-term employment opportunities.

I wanted to spend the remainder of my time discussing Youth Family Team Meetings and our community based continuum of care, two components of our reform efforts that will reduce our secure care population and ensure that youth are placed in the most appropriate placements.

Early in my administration, DYRS formed an Improvement Team to develop recommendations for case planning and service delivery. This group consisted of both a wide range of DYRS employees, other government partners (DMH, CFSA, PDS and OAG) as well as a large contingent of community stakeholders (Collaborative Council, Consortium for Youth Services and other advocates and providers). This group recommended adopting a family group conferencing model, which we refer to as Youth Family Team Meetings (YFTM).

Since then, DYRS has conducted series of trainings and ongoing practical coaching for YFTM facilitators. This month, we trained all case managers, supervisory staff, and social services staff working with detained youth at YSC and youth awaiting placement at Oak Hill Youth Center.

In addition, DYRS has been realigning our agency to support Youth Family Team Meetings. The organizational realignment of DYRS, which was recently submitted to the Mayor's office for review and approval, would establish a new division: the Resource Management and Utilization Division. This Division will be responsible for identifying, developing, resourcing, managing, brokering, and tracking utilization of the continuum of residential and

non-residential community-based programs, services, support, and opportunities made available to detained and committed youth under the Department's care and custody. The Division also is responsible for contract management, expediting pre-dispositional case planning, scheduling and facilitating Youth/Family Team Meetings, program referral and placement, maximizing the recovery of Medicaid and Title IV funds, securing government and private grant funding, and developing partnerships with other public agencies, civic groups, community-based organizations and employers to expand the availability of services, supports, and opportunities for DYRS youth. The new division will include four (4) full time YFTM facilitators and one unit manager. After consultation with CFSA, our sister agency, which along with DMH, has been extremely helpful as we've sought to emulate their approach, we have drafted position descriptions and they are currently being classified.

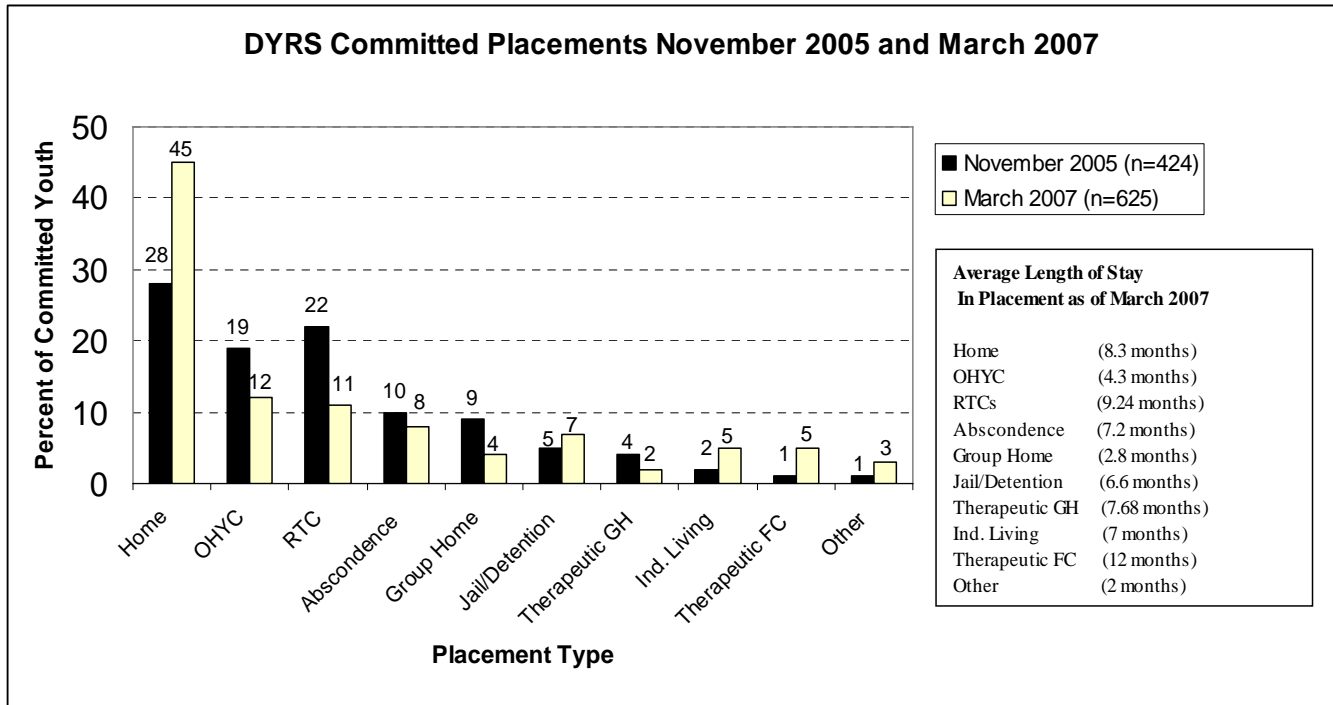
The YFTM process has been slowly gaining momentum. We have tried to be careful in choosing manageable cohorts of youth to begin our YFTM process. Our initial focus has been on conducting YFTMs for youth with moderate offenses and offense histories because the service and placement decisions are often less clear cut than those of youth with the most serious offenses. We have also focused on providing YFTMs for pre and post adjudicated girls. This has contributed to a dramatic reduction in the number of girls detained at YSC. Let me reiterate that – better, more collaborative case processing has contributed to better decision-making about girls, which in turn, has let to a system that relies less on the 'easy' rout of over confining girls. I'd be remiss at this point if I failed to note that a big part of why we've been able to place girls in more appropriate settings is the LOTS program established by Court Social Services and the awareness raising and education about girls issues that the Family Court engaged in through their mandatory training last fall.

We have also begun to use the YFTM framework for our placement revocation process. As we expand our pool of facilitators, staff up the YFTM unit and train our case management staff in the important task of coordination we will expand the YFTM process to a broader array of youth. Within the next twelve months, the YFTM process will be used in the service planning for all committed youth.

So that's three commitments I've made to this committee, the youth, my staff and DC residents – by next year 1) all YSC staff will be trained in the new approach we are using at that facility; 2) all Oak Hill staff will be trained on the new "DC Model" approach; and 3) all new commitments to DYRS will have their case plans developed through a collaborative, youth and family-focused, strengths-based process called a Youth Family Team Meeting. I encourage this committee to hold my feet to the fire on this when I come back here next year for DYRS' oversight and budget hearings.

Having a robust continuum of care will add tremendous value to the YFTM process, allowing youth, families, care managers, and other supports to choose from a plethora of services and supports that will meet youth's individual needs. You have already heard from David Muhammad, our Chief of Committed and some of our evidence-based practices providers about our continuum of care. In today's materials, you will find data demonstrating the effectiveness of our detention alternatives, including Evening Reporting Centers and Intensive Third Party Monitoring Programs. The continuum of care has allowed us to decrease the

number of youth placed in secure facilities and in Residential Treatment Centers, the most expensive and often least effective service options, while increasing the number of youth we place at home and in the community with the supports and services they need. In the bar graph below, you will find a good illustration on how far we have come from November of 2005.



This fiscal year will be an interesting and exciting chapter in our reform efforts – at one point, we will be operating not two, but three facilities as we open up Oak Hill’s replacement facility; we will have opened up a cutting edge school delivering the best educational and workforce development opportunities that can be offered; we will be implementing a number of new evidence-based practices and new programming for girls. I believe the FY 2008 budget supports our reform efforts in providing the highest quality services to our youth and their families. I respectfully submit the Department’s Fiscal Year 2008 budget and appreciate the Committee’s continued support as we develop a juvenile justice system for which we can all be proud and which can serve as a model for jurisdictions throughout the country. I look forward to answering any questions that you may have at this time.